

SELECT BOARD

Fiscal Year 2008

The Select Board began FY 08 with members Anne Awad, Alisa Brewer, Rob Kusner, Hwei-Ling Greeney and Gerry Weiss. After the Annual Town Election in the spring, Mr. Kusner and Ms. Greeney were replaced by Diana Stein and Stephanie O’Keeffe. The service and dedication of Mr. Kusner and Ms. Greeney were much appreciated.

Documenting every action the Select Board takes in a given year would require creating a small book, so we will try to summarize where possible, give a flavor of the work of the Select Board and highlight what we feel have been important developments.

Direction/Encouragement of Town Manager:

- Recommended reconsideration of policy to charge groups using the Common for Police details; policy was tabled due to dissatisfaction that it could be equitably applied in current form
- Conducted first evaluation of Larry Shaffer
- Encouraged formation of Blue Ribbon Task Force to analyze potential to consolidate certain staffing and administrative efforts of Schools and Town
- Supported ongoing negotiations with institutions of higher education; one result – unrestricted gift from Amherst College and an increase in the University’s contribution to the Town for Fire/EMS services in a Strategic Partnership Agreement
- Mr. Shaffer suggested closing Town Hall offices on Thursday mornings to increase productivity and efficiency. The SB agreed with the idea which has now been in place for over a year with no significant inconvenience to the public
- Encouraged the Town Manager in his discussions with Pelham, Hadley, Leverett, Shutesbury and Sunderland about ambulance service payments

Day-to-Day Business:

- Improved our understanding of upcoming and ongoing zoning Town Meeting warrant articles through Select Board representation at the Zoning Subcommittee meetings of the Planning Board, and by providing updates to colleagues at Select Board meetings
- Made recommendations on warrant articles for Fall Town Meeting and supported several important Zoning Bylaw amendments which passed, including: rezoning of the intersection of College Street and South East Street to encourage mixed residential and commercial development, increasing the viability of the Professional Research Park zone by allowing visits from clients by appointment and allowing inns as a by-right use with Site Plan Review in the downtown business district; and allowing increased research and development on University Drive
- Began voting formal deadlines for the submission of citizen petitions for Town Meeting warrant articles
- Made recommendations on warrant articles for Spring Town Meeting, supporting Historical Preservation (Woman’s Club Carriage House, Kimball House) and

Affordable Housing (Olympia Drive project); recommended that Town Meeting support a ballot initiative to increase the CPA surcharge from 1.5% to 3%. Recommended the establishment of a Municipal Parking District as well as other important zoning changes; recommended new policy to help reduce false burglar alarm calls by fining faulty alarm owners; supported rescission of outdated DNA bylaw; supported instituting a Nuisance house bylaw to help control offensive partying in residential neighborhoods; did not support the rezoning of 500-02 Sunderland Road

- Continued to discuss the purpose of designating some Town boards and committees as having "special municipal employee" status rather than simply "municipal employee" status, and the role of applicants and appointees in understanding these designations
- Continued to discuss the role of community participation in Select Board meetings; whether time limits should be applied to general public comment, under what circumstances public comment would be taken during Select Board discussion of individual agenda items, etc
- Continued to work on balancing the Select Board decisions that had to be made on properties as they came to market, e.g., Haskins View/East Leverett Road Self-Help Grant, 539 Market Hill Road Chapter 61A, while awaiting potential availability of Community Preservation Act funding and the completion of the Master Plan, which was based on extensive community engagement
- Continued to discuss the relationship of the Select Board to the Amherst and Amherst Regional School Committees regarding the budget process, particularly around elementary school class size, the Amherst Community Aquatics Center/Middle School pool, and the use of Regional reserves
- Filled a vacant ARA position by joint election with the remaining ARA members
- Worked to encourage advocates for the homeless to participate in various committees and efforts associated with this Amherst and Pioneer Valley issue
- Amherst and Hadley officials discussed opportunities for working together, and with UMass, on economic development and other issues facing the two communities. The Amherst Select Board met with the Hadley Select Board in Hadley Town Hall August 15
- Approved charge for Water Supply Protection Committee, a new committee expanding on and superseding the charge of the Aquifer Protection Committee
- Encouraged municipal and school patronage of local businesses when possible under state procurement limitations
- Approved charge for Nyeri, Kenya Sister City Committee
- Adopted equal tax rate without an open space discount, and declined residential and small commercial exemption options
- Dissolved UMass voting subprecincts, per request of the UMass Student Government Association
- Accepted Deed for Haskins View - East Leverett Road property, approved for acquisition at Fall 2007 Town Meeting;
- Discussed the Select Board role in appointing applicants to boards and committees and Select Board responsibility for the functioning of the boards and committees under the Amherst Town Government Act and in practice

- Discussed the role of the Select Board Chair in meetings of other bodies where the Select Board had not voted a position on matters to be discussed
- Filled a vacant Library Trustee position by joint election with the remaining Library Trustees
- Opted not to exercise right of first refusal for properties on Market Hill Road and Bay Road
- Made adjustments in meetings to allow citizen oriented business to be handled early in the evening
- Minutes taken by Ms. O’Keeffe, beginning in May, saving staff time and allowing minutes to be completed and posted more quickly
- Added regular liaison reports and expanded Town Manager reporting to weekly meetings
- Began work of paring down the number of committees. All committee appointments are now done by a team of two SB members
- Requested that a complaint management system be instituted by IT, which is now operational
- Approved several road and sidewalk projects, for example, the northern end of S. Pleasant Street
- Helped secure the donation of over 30 large flower pots for downtown
- Increased water and sewer rates
- Increased Ambulance fees for emergency medical services
- Voted that Town equipment would no longer be used in private parades after the July 4, 2008 parade and voted (4:1) to not officially participate in the 2008 parade
- Worked to define our roles as liaisons and representatives of multiple Town boards and committees

Budget Process

Continued efforts to improve Select Board participation and public input in to budget process:

- Rejected a proposal to use a Special Town Meeting format and instead supported a community forum to provide information on the financial situation and have a discussion about override options
- Held joint meeting with the Finance Committee to hear Regional and Elementary School budget plans
- Met on a Saturday in February to discuss budget priorities
- Worked in tandem with the Finance Committee, the Budget Coordinating Committee, the Town Manager and Finance Director to present a unified budget for the Annual Town Meeting

Informing Public through SB Discussions:

- Held public hearings in advance of the Community Development Block Grant application
- Heard presentations for all Fall and Annual (Spring) Town Meeting articles
- Previewed the complaint/request tracking system planned for next generation of Town web site

- Discussed plans and potential uses for the new reverse-911 automated phone system
- Discussed possible implications to Amherst of a court decision finding Newton's improvement of recreation land to be an ineligible use of CPA funds
- Discussed Town Manager's plans to undertake feasibility study for downtown Business Improvement District
- Arranged to host public viewing of a webcast of "The 2% Solution" and discussion of energy conservation ideas (technical difficulties prevented the viewing, but the discussion still occurred). An update of the Town's Climate Action Plan was also presented
- Heard from PVRTA Administrator regarding budget issues, plans to deal with shoveling/plowing of bus stops, and opportunities for refurbishing/replacing bus shelters
- Heard updates on road issues, including traffic calming efforts, the status of the light on North Pleasant St. at Fearing, the status of the Atkins Corner project, plans for improvements to University Drive, downtown sidewalk work and sidewalk snowplowing policy
- Heard a presentation by Alan Snow, Tree Warden on a plan for tree maintenance
- Three-term Select Board member Anne Awad announced her resignation as of August 31 citing fear for her safety, prompting her to move up her timetable of relocation to another town.

Citizen Assistance:

- Addressed garbage situation for areas near UMass in the Lincoln Ave. and Fearing St. neighborhood
- Heard concerns about past Town Meeting action supporting childcare subsidies, resulting in Town Manager identifying available funds

Support for Causes:

- Signed citizen petition letter urging legislators to prevent a U.S.-led attack on Iran
- Signed letter supporting Environmental Bond Bill put forth by Massachusetts Audubon Society
- Voted to support MMA's resolution requesting that the legislature distribute 40% of the State tax levy to cities and towns (approved Ms. Greeney casting Amherst's vote of support at the MMA annual convention)
- Voted to support ICLEI's "State of the Climate" document
- Voted to co-sponsor the Richard Heinberg talk and events on Peak Oil and Global warming